

Religious Cleavage and Aspects of Catholic Identity in Modern Scotland

JOSEPH M. BRADLEY, B.A., Ph.D.

Introduction: Sectarianism

Religion for almost half a millennium has been crucial to Scotland's social and political development. The aim here is to throw understanding on the contemporary situation in Scotland in the light of the cleavage that arose from the mix of indigenous Scots Protestants and the arrival of immigrant Irish Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specifically, this paper will look at the Irish Catholic identity and how it has been affected in its Scottish context.

One of the key problems with much of present ethno-religious literature is that it operates with a narrow understanding of religious identity using sectarianism as a key concept. As such, many authors ignore the multi-faceted nature of religious identity in Scotland. Although an important work, Gallagher adopts such language in his book *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace*:

If sectarianism is still capable of a last hurrah in Scotland, the evidence presented in these pages suggests that it will not be on the same scale witnessed in Northern Ireland.¹

Murray's popular look at religious cleavage in Scottish society uses a similar terminology:

Scotland's segregated education system is still the biggest hurdle to overcome in the elimination of sectarianism....²

Similarly, Scottish newspapers over the years have consistently referred to sectarianism in reporting on issues from Irish political demonstrations to debates on the controversial subject of Catholic

¹ T. Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987), 354.

² B. Murray, *The Old Firm: Sectarianism, Sport and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1984), 275.

schools in Scotland. In its Scottish context, sectarianism has been utilised as a concept to explain areas of Scottish life which remain unaddressed or obscured. Of course, the use of the term sectarianism is appropriate in a number of instances; certainly when applied to narrow mindedness, bigotry and intolerance. However, the term has evolved to become a catch-all and evasive phrase to describe many aspects of religious, national, political and cultural identities in Scottish society.

This contribution will investigate why and how some of these identities are misrepresented. This concern leads us to the question of why football in Scotland says something important about religious identity in Scottish society. In Scotland, football has a larger significance than that of a simple spectator sport; it is a repository of meaning which says a great deal about the society itself.

The data reported here is derived from an attitudinal survey carried out as part of a larger study which looked at religious identity in Scottish society.³ The great majority of the population is in the central belt including almost all of the Catholics in the population. For this reason much (but certainly not all) of my sample was drawn from this area. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the background and attitudes of a sample of various groups in Scottish society. In order to substantiate and elaborate on some of the popular perceptions of Scottish football, various religious and political questions were asked. A sample of the fans of all the largest clubs in Scotland was surveyed. In addition, and to extend the football aspect of the study, Catholic Church attenders, Church of Scotland attenders, members of the Orange Institution of Scotland and members of various Irish political and cultural groups were questioned. Overall, approximately two thousand people were questioned.

The questions asked were determined by the theoretical and substantive concerns of the larger work. Hence they dealt with the respondents' demographic background, that is age, sex, class, religion, geographic area, occupation, education, and ethnic identity. The questions also drew on attitudes to well-known symbols of Scottish and

³ J.M. Bradley, *Ethnic and Religious Identity in Modern Scotland: Culture, Politics and Football* (Aldershot, 1995), *passim*.

Irish national identity, to religious observance, to discrimination, the monarchy, attitudes to constitutional arrangements in Scotland, to Northern Ireland, to ethnicity and support for football teams.

Care was taken to make sure that there was a sensible spread in terms of age and gender. It was of course difficult to construct a representative sample of any of the groups surveyed. In addition, limited resources meant that the samples while sizeable were not large. However, every attempt was made to assure a broad sample. This survey provides conclusions, which could of course be followed up by other surveys of larger samples. For the purposes of this particular study, only the survey material most relevant has been utilised.

The first section of this paper will draw on an historical perspective regarding the importance of football, in particular of Rangers and Celtic, to many people in Scotland. The second part reviews anecdotal as well as survey material in relation to national identity, political, cultural or otherwise. A brief reference is made to the area of Scottish politics in section three. The penultimate part of the article analyses the contemporary identity of the Irish in Scotland. Finally a general perspective is drawn.

Religious Identity and Scottish Football

Football, whether playing or spectating, has been the most popular sport in Scotland for some one hundred years. It is also the case that the Scottish game is dominated by both Rangers and Celtic football clubs. Although other countries also have a few clubs which have dominated their respective games (sometimes only periodically), this is generally due to their success which generates a huge support from the normally large population centre where they are located. In contrast, it is the specific origins, subsequent developments, and the very nature of the two big Scottish clubs (and of the Scottish game more generally), which make Rangers and Celtic important in terms of cultural, ethno-religious, social and political interpretation.

The importance of Celtic to the Irish Catholic immigrant community is noted by Campbell and Woods⁴:

The Celtic support revelled in the triumphs of the team, compensating as they did for the daily troubles in a harsh life amid uncongenial surroundings; the neutral Scottish enthusiast (distinctive of the already established Glasgow Rangers supporter) understandably resented the nationalist undertones of Celtic's achievements and looked around for a more representative team to cheer for against the Irishmen.

Rangers were a Protestant team in a similar way that all senior clubs in Scotland, other than Celtic and Hibernian, were Protestant. However, a combination of factors enabled Rangers to encapsulate, or become the main focus of, a particular Protestant identity which had a strong political, cultural and social character and was infused with a number of anti-Catholic features.

Celtic's early successes were resented by society at large. In 1896 Celtic and Hibernian (an Edinburgh side which had also emerged from the Irish community there) were top of the Scottish league, prompting a newspaper, *Scottish Sport*, to note the dominance in Scotland of two Irish teams and more or less asking where the Scottish team was that could challenge them.⁵ Rangers, through their ability to halt this Irish dominance of Scottish football, assumed a native prestige. They attracted the strongest attention in the sporting battle with Celtic. Football enthusiasts naturally liked success and this attracted many people to support Rangers. Invariably the nationalist or ethnic dimension to this particular rivalry proved potent to many Rangers' fans. The very existence of the Celtic club in Scotland therefore spawned a reaction from the rest of Scottish football.

⁴ T. Campbell and P. Woods, *The Glory and the Dream, the History of Celtic FC, 1887-1986* (Edinburgh, 1986), 65.

⁵ Murray, *The Old Firm*, 31.

The Fans: Attitudes, Perceptions and National Identity

In mid-1988, the following football letter appeared in Scotland's most popular Sunday newspaper, *The Sunday Mail*.⁶

On holiday in Scotland, I watched football in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and it was first class. Certainly better than anything I've seen down here. The only thing that puzzled me was when Celtic played Dundee at Parkhead the home fans [Celtic's] were waving the Republic of Ireland flag. How confusing!

If the writer was as confused as he made himself out to be, he would probably have been more confounded had he also picked up the words of many of the football songs being chanted by the followers of the clubs he saw playing.

In response to the Irish Catholic nature of the Celtic club, there is a strong anti-Irish and Catholic dimension to many other clubs in Scotland. One of the most popular football songs in Scotland is the "Billy Boys":

Hello, hello, we are the Billy Boys.
Hello, hello, you can tell us by our noise.
We're up to our knees in Fenian blood,
Surrender or you'll die.
For we are the Billy Billy Boys.

One writer in replying to a Celtic supporter's newspaper attack on Rangers' supposed sectarian, anti-Catholic club policy, wrote:⁷

I suggest that, when the flag of a foreign and frequently hostile state, whose constitution impudently claims sovereignty over part of the United Kingdom, and whose land and people the present pope has declared to be "Mary's Dowry", no longer flies from the mast-head of "Paradise", there may be, I say only may be, less "bigoting" in the stands of Ibrox.

⁶ *Sunday Mail*, 1 May 1988.

⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 6 May 1990.

In these views, religion, politics and football are compounded. Such anecdotal material is plentiful. It stresses the nature of the Scottish game, whilst also being indicative of both the ethno-religious cleavage in Scottish society and the importance of an Irish identity to those who follow Celtic.

At a national level, such differences are also manifest. After a Scotland versus Poland international match during May of 1990, the following letter appeared in the *Daily Record*:⁸

I stood on the East Terracing [the traditional Celtic end of the national stadium], puzzled by the sound of silence when Flower of Scotland [the unofficial Scottish national anthem] was played. I didn't realise there were so many Polish immigrants in Scotland for the only spark round me was when Celtic double-act Dziekanowski and Wdowczyk were on the ball.

Because of their repetitiveness and thematic consistency, such letters can be viewed as typical of a widespread perception that Celtic fans have a negative view of the Scottish national team. In this particular example, it is the view of the letter-writer that Celtic fans at the match were not supporting Scotland's national team (this, despite the presence of a Celtic player and ex-Celtic players in the side). Not so apparent among these letters, though referred to in many of the following Sunday newspaper match reports, was the constant booing and antagonism being displayed towards the Celtic player Dziekanowski from major sections of the rest of the crowd, thus reflecting the difficulty that many Celtic/Catholic players have encountered over the years when playing for Scotland.⁹

The survey question for the larger study, which asked the Celtic fans which international side they supported or liked, showed that none of them in fact indicated a preference for Poland. Clearly, those Celtic fans who did attend the Scotland versus Poland match, who were noticeable to the letter-writer by their silence during a major Scottish

⁸ *Daily Record*, 26 May 1990.

⁹ Many references have been made by former Celtic players of their difficulty in playing for Scotland due to the abuse they have been subjected to by Scottish supporters.

anthem, and who apparently cheered Poland's Celtic players as opposed to Scotland's players, did not identify with the Scotland team.

Although identifying with the Scottish national team is seen by the wider football community (including the media) as being natural, this is not the view of Celtic fans.¹⁰ In fact, a majority of Celtic fans surveyed indicated an "ambivalence" towards the national side; almost 54% said they never attend the Scottish side's matches. This in contrast to the 85-90% of other Scottish clubs fans who either always or sometimes attend the games of the national team. In fact, a majority of Celtic fans (52%) state that they support the Republic of Ireland. Again, this factor remains a manifestation of the diverse character of the game in Scottish society, and a more subtle indicator of an identity which is not recognised in Scotland, except in sectarian terms.

As is evidenced by much of the singing done by Celtic fans, this affinity with Ireland also takes on a political dimension. Indeed, both Rangers and Celtic jerseys and emblems are frequently worn in Northern Irish areas.¹¹ So, Rangers become strongly identified with the cause of Northern Ireland Unionism/Loyalism and Orangeism, whilst Celtic emit a Catholic identity and a brand of Irish nationalism.

One Republican publication recently reported that:¹²

One of our best areas for sales is Glasgow, so we were surprised to find 60 copies of our last issue returned unsold. However, our puzzlement turned to sympathy when we read the accompanying note – "Enclosing some unavoidable returns which would have been sold at Parkhead if Celtic hadn't done so poorly this season".

With sentiments relating to the political situation expressed on the terracings of Scottish football, the survey also asked questions in relation to this subject. Four out of five Celtic supporters supported a united Ireland in contrast to the 55% of the general British population who take such a view.¹³ Rangers fans surveyed believe that Northern

¹⁰ For example, see James Traynor's articles in the *Herald*, 12 Oct. 1992 and 22 Aug. 1994.

¹¹ Bradley, *Ethnic and Religious Identity*, *passim*.

¹² *The Captive Voice*, vol. 3, no. 2.

¹³ British Social Attitudes Survey, 1990/91.

Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom. This figure indicates the “loyalism” of the Rangers fans. Most Motherwell, Hearts and Kilmarnock supporters also support the “keep Northern Ireland British” option; a position which is occasionally reflected in some of the vocal opinions of their fans at games. Indeed a significant number of other fans in Scottish football can be considered Unionist on Northern Ireland (a high number were also unsure of their opinions), though Rangers fans are exceptional in their uniformity. In relation to the Celtic support, such figures suggest a strong politico-cultural connection between Celtic fans and Ireland; one which is highly distinctive in terms of the broad spectrum of Scottish football fans.

Ethnic, cultural, and religious differentiation becomes clearer in the way the fans answer the survey question of “ascriptive identity”. A degree of Scottish or Irish consciousness can be detected with the “identifying” symbols included in the questionnaire. These identifying symbols were included in the questionnaire, in order to give further evidence of the depth and type of difference which exists between those of a Scottish Protestant and those of an Irish Catholic background. A number of Scottish and Irish symbols were chosen.

Respondents were asked with which of the symbols they identified. As far as the Scottish symbols were concerned the Thistle was well favoured by all fans, except the Celtic supporters, of whom only 21% chose it. The highest identifiers with the Thistle were the fans of Motherwell (76%) and Dundee United (74%). The Bagpipes were also chosen as a symbol of Scottish identity. Once again, Celtic fans were significantly different from all the other clubs; only 15% displaying any kind of attraction for the Bagpipes. In contrast, identification with the Bagpipes was the highest among Kilmarnock (60%), Aberdeen (58%) and Motherwell (48%) fans.

Of the more political symbols, the Corries (a Scottish Folk group whose songs often relate to Scottish independence), received most support among Aberdeen (29%) St Johnstone (32%) and Kilmarnock (24%) fans. One quarter of Motherwell fans also expressed an attachment to the Corries. Robert the Bruce was approved by Dundee United (63%), Aberdeen (61%), St Johnstone (61%), and Hearts (56%)

fans. Celtic fans with 17% were again the lowest in this category of identity.

The national popularity of Robert Burns was reflected in his being chosen in such high numbers by many fans. A massive 70% of Kilmarnock fans (partly a reflection of the poet's own origins in this area), 59% of Hearts fans, 57% of Rangers supporters and 54% of St Johnstone fans bear out the popular image and potent symbolism of the Ayrshire poet. With only 13% of Celtic fans choosing Burns as an element in their cultural identity, they again reveal their difference from the other fans.

As far as the Irish symbols are concerned, the Harp does not claim many identifiers. The Shamrock also proved of little attraction for most of the fans. No Rangers, Kilmarnock or St Johnstone supporters at all related to this; and only nine fans from the rest of the clubs did so. However, not surprisingly seeing that it is a specific emblem of the club itself, over half of the Celtic fans positively identified with the shamrock, a most significant Irish symbol.

Padraic Pearse the leader of the 1916 Irish Uprising was also relatively popular among Celtic fans, almost one quarter identifying with him. Most other clubs' fans did not choose Pearse at all; only five in total from all other clubs. Similarly, only five fans in total from clubs other than Celtic picked the Irish ballad/folk group, the Wolfe Tones, a band noted, like the Corries, for their nationalist singing. In contrast a significant 53% of Celtic fans singled out this group. The Celtic fans' choice of Pearse and the Wolfe Tones confirmed the links between Celtic fans and Irish nationalism. Over half of Celtic fans also identified with the figure of St Patrick.

Religious Identity, Scottish Politics and Football

Are these attitudinal differences and perceptions on a diversity of interrelated topics related to political affiliation in Scotland? Are these diversities of opinion between Celtic and the other supporters, particularly fans of Rangers, reflected in party political partisanship?

Clearly this is so. Again, it is the Celtic fans who reveal the clearest pattern. In the General Election of 1987, Labour achieved its best ever Scottish General Election result with 42.4% of the poll. However, 85%

Table 1
Fans' political party support

Group	Labour	Conserv- ative	Lib Dems	SNP	Soc Dems	Other	None	Row Total
Rangers Fans	33.0 (29)	31.8 (28)	1.1 (1)	13.6 (12)		6.8 (6)	13.6 (12)	20.0 (88)
Hearts Fans	45.0 (18)	12.5 (5)		20.0 (8)	2.5 (1)	2.5 (1)	17.5 (7)	9.1 (40)
Aberdeen Fans	26.3 (15)	17.5 (10)	8.8 (5)	33.3 (19)			14.0 (8)	12.9 (57)
Kilmarnock Fans	57.7 (30)	9.6 (5)	1.9 (1)	21.2 (11)			9.6 (5)	11.8 (52)
Celtic Fans	84.7 (83)	3.1 (3)	1.0 (1)	4.1 (4)		2.0 (2)	5.1 (5)	22.2 (98)
Motherwell Fans	34.4 (11)	9.4 (3)		37.5 (12)		3.1 (1)	15.6 (5)	7.3 (32)
Hibernian Fans	33.3 (6)	11.1 (2)		16.7 (3)			38.9 (7)	4.1 (18)
Dundee United Fans	31.8 (7)	4.5 (1)		40.9 (9)			22.7 (5)	5.0 (22)
St Johnstone Fans	11.8 (4)	29.4 (10)	2.9 (1)	23.5 (8)			32.4 (11)	7.7 (34)
Column Total	46.0 (20)	15.2 (67)	2.0 (9)	19.5 (83)	0.2 (1)	2.3 (10)	14.7 (65)	100.0 (441)

of the Celtic support here indicates an adherence to the Labour Party. Celtic fans are of course overwhelmingly Catholic (93%) and working class, and the working class and Catholics tend to support the Labour Party.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the figure of 85% is a massive one.

The outstanding feature of the football aspect of the survey is the distinctiveness of the Celtic support on a wide range of issues and attitudes, including attitudes to Northern Ireland and party preference. Most Celtic fans also chose Irish symbols over Scottish ones. In addition they are not on the whole supportive of the Scottish international football team. Indeed, their identity is partly defined by their support for the Republic of Ireland soccer team. The non-Celtic supporters in the survey do not always share social and political attitudes. However, the degree of divergence among them on the questions asked is not so startling or consistent, as the distinction between them and Celtic fans. It is at all times the Celtic, and thus the overwhelmingly Catholic team's support, which is distinct.

The important point here is that anecdotal and survey evidence suggest a still strong Irish identity among the Catholics of Scotland. Celtic provides the platform on which many Catholics relate to their ethnic-religious identity and the community to which they belong and, just as importantly, the one to which they do not. Almost four in five of male Catholic mass attenders surveyed, from all classes, ages and educational backgrounds, mentioned Celtic as the football team which they supported. Even among the few women football supporters, over three in five Catholics named Celtic as their favourite soccer side. Similarly, other "Catholic" organisations have close contact with Celtic; so 96% of the members of the Irish Republican political solidarity movement and the Irish cultural bodies surveyed named Celtic as their favourite football club.

Contemporary identity: Irish Catholics in Scotland

Historically, the Scottish Catholic Church since the Reformation encouraged a low profile in all spheres of political and social life. The

¹⁴ W.L. Miller, *The End of British Politics? Scots and English Political Behaviour in the Seventies*(Oxford, 1981), 144-6.

Church made up around 1% of the Scottish population in 1790, but, due to Irish immigration to Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that percentage rose until Catholics numbered 446,000 in 1901, and approximately 744,600 by 1992/93 – around 15-16% of the population.

Despite the Irish presence, the dominant bishops and priests of the native church were from the north-eastern part of the country, where “appointment and genealogy went hand in hand”.¹⁵ As Aspinwall argues; “Bishop Scott was to tell the Poor Law Commission his flock was too Irish”.¹⁶ Such a situation caused a number of political and cultural problems between the small native Church and the numerically more significant immigrant one. With most power lying with the native Church the Irish identity of the immigrants was affected to its detriment.

Apart from what might be considered normal factors (e.g., inter-marriage, loss of contacts with relations in Ireland, secularisation, etc.), and in addition to animosity from the native hierarchy, sectarianism on the part of many different sections of the Scottish populace has been responsible for much of the change that has taken place in the character of the Irish identity in Scotland. A most significant factor in affecting this identity, and one that is related in many ways to the first two, has been the historic relationship between Ireland and Britain.

Politically, the Irish integrated into the host society, particularly via their involvement with the British Labour movement. Nonetheless, as this contribution shows, a pre-dominant feature of the immigrant psychology has always contained a concern with the national question back in Ireland.

In the wake of the 1987 IRA bombing at Enniskillen, in which a number of civilians were killed, a *Glasgow Herald* article emphasised “the tacit support for the IRA that you can read off virtually any wall in Glasgow and which you can hear, chanted from the terraces of Celtic

¹⁵ Cooney, *Scotland and the Papacy* (Edinburgh, 1982), 39.

¹⁶ B. Aspinwall, “The Scottish Religious Identity in the Atlantic World”, *Studies in Church History*, 18 (1982), 242.

Park, or wherever Celtic players take the field".¹⁷ In an article in the Scottish Catholic Observer in 1986, the same writer spoke of the pro-Hunger Strike graffiti on the walls of Coatbridge in Lanarkshire.¹⁸ More generally, a number of clubs and pubs in the West-Central belt have regular Irish "rebel sessions" in which the most popular songs of the evening will inevitably be those which reflect support for the ideals and goals of Irish nationalism, the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin.

However, one of the outcomes of a "deviant" political disposition has been a series of articles, generally in response to IRA outrages, which have given prominence to appointed Catholic spokesmen. So, among recent headlines in the Catholic press have been: "Abandon the IRA."¹⁹ "No place in the Church for the IRA."²⁰ "Church leaders condemn IRA's bloody actions."²¹ Considering the history of the Irish community and its media in Scotland, it might be expected that these newspapers would offer different or more open comment on the situation in Northern Ireland. Certainly, in the past Catholic newspapers challenged British interpretations of the Irish problem (a good example is to be found in Gallagher's account of the career of Charles Diamond in *The Uneasy Peace* (1987). Even now the Catholic press will print a letter which questions such an interpretation, as well as the motivation of the Catholic hierarchy. So for example one reader argued:

....When we begin to look at the roots of the problem between Ireland and Britain; when we are prepared to analyse both the causes and the motivations for the related violence; when we stop condemning no one but the IRA; and when censorship is broken down to allow free speech and round the table discussions; only then can the righteous judge.²²

¹⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 13 Nov. 1987.

¹⁸ Scottish Catholic Observer [SCO], 21 March 1986.

¹⁹ SCO, 27 July 1990.

²⁰ SCO, 13 Oct. 1989.

²¹ SCO, 26 Aug. 1988.

²² SCO, 3 Nov. 1989.

Yet, the Catholic press in Scotland has changed dramatically since the time of Diamond and at no time more than in the post-1969 "Troubles" period. There are few other references to Ireland except when Irish related bodies, cultural groups or the Irish Tourist Board contribute articles or advertisements. The Catholic press therefore is not unlike the general British Press in matters Irish. Overall, there is a great emphasis on things Scottish. In fact, the newspapers carry periodic criticism of Catholics who express an Irish identity, especially if it is seen as being at the expense of a Scottish identity. This can be seen to reflect a lack of clarity in Catholic social and cultural identity. It also indicates the complexity of modern Catholic or immigrant Irish culture in Scotland. After one such newspaper attack upon the Irish in Scotland, a number of readers answered back. One stated:

How close one wants to stay to one's roots is of course a personal decision and the ethnic Irish certainly don't need any lectures on "valuing Irish ancestry above a Scottish birth". It is hardly the function of a Catholic paper nor indeed of the Church to tell people where their loyalties should lie. Too many people in the Church in Scotland are ashamed of, and want to hide, our Irish ancestry; this is why we never hear them decrying those of Italian or Polish descent who are not all that bothered about a Scottish birth either.²³

Many Catholics in Scotland have an identity in relation to both Ireland and Scotland which varies in intensity and emphasis depending on circumstance and environment. "Irishness" has, for a large number of people, become privatised and is "reduced" in many cases to support for Celtic, St Patrick's celebrations, calling children by Irish forenames and retaining suppressed feelings on political relations between Ireland and Britain. The formative influences of the Irish identity have changed. Part of the reason for this, however, is that there exists few structured means of expressing "Irishness". There are few vehicles of expression adequate to its self-consciousness. It is an identity often insecure and with little sense of future. This community can be either

²³ SCO, 16 Nov. 1990.

Irish or Scottish in certain settings, but on the whole they find it difficult to define and articulate their identity.

Identity itself can often be a source of confusion, inconsistency and even anxiety. Individuals may find it difficult to define the content and origins of their identity. Bearing in mind the loss of identity inevitable via incorporation into the host society, the inability or desire not to articulate an Irish background should be seen mainly as a consequence of exposure to a dominating and antagonistic indigenous culture and identity. But also, as already briefly mentioned, it is the result of Scotland-Britain's relationship with Ireland over a period of hundreds of years. Irish identity in Scotland has been shaped by the immigrants' experiences. Over and above the "Celtic" experience, the Irish, like immigrants in many other countries, thought the best way to survive was to keep a low profile.

Because the Catholics of Scotland do not differ in any critical physical way from the indigenous population, and because of their "integrative history" it is not usual to consider them as an ethnic minority. Such terms have only become commonplace in the late twentieth century and well after the vast majority of Irish immigration to Scotland had taken place. However, they are "a group with a common cultural tradition and a sense of identity which exists as a subgroup of the larger society". In addition, as an ethnic group, they differ with regard to certain cultural characteristics from the other members of their society.²⁴

Although the concept of ethnicity applies to the Irish in Scotland, it must be remembered that few communities are completely watertight. Indeed, a strong argument could be made that the Irish and Catholic community, as well as being a distinctive one, is also splintering. This reflects in a lessening Church commitment and a loss, or contraction, of an articulate Irish identity. LeVine and Campbell suggest that groups should be seen as cores of interaction and cultural affinity with contour lines of variation stretching almost imperceptibly into other groups.

²⁴ W.W. Isajiw, "The Irish in Britain: A Question of Identity", *Irish Studies in Britain*, no. 3 (spring/summer 1982), 111-24.

Again this is true with regard to the Irish in Scotland.²⁵ Nonetheless, its spiritual and traditional conventions and beliefs, its unique educational arrangements, its massive support for the Labour Party, the desire to see the re-unification of the island of Ireland (which indicates a sub-nationalism – a strong sense of Irishness but with little or no national project) and the presence of Celtic Football Club, all point toward a cohesiveness of tradition, history and belief, that sets the Irish Catholic (second, third and fourth generation) apart as a distinct ethnic grouping in Scottish society. The Irish identity in Scotland stands out as a Catholic one.²⁶ A sense of this identity continues to act as a political and cultural reference – even for many Catholics who are unchurched.

However, although the Irish ethnic identity in Scotland is a tangible one, it is also largely hidden and not articulated. This is the result of both historical processes and observable and resultant traits. Keyes states:

While ethnic groups are based fundamentally on the idea of shared descent [in this case religion is an intricate part of this “sharing”], they take their particular form as a consequence of the structure of intergroup relations.²⁷

In the context of Scotland, these relations have been almost exclusively of a Protestant-Catholic type.

British colonialism in Ireland is crucial to our understanding of the modern Irish identity in Scotland. Davey states:

For centuries Britain had a master-servant relationship with their colonial subjects in different parts of the world. Not only was the relationship economically and politically exploitative

²⁵ R.A. LeVine and D.T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behaviour* (New York, 1972).

²⁶ See C.F. Keyes, “Towards a New Formulation of the Concept of Ethnic Group”, *Ethnicity*, vol. 1, no. 3 (September 1976), 202-13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

but Britons convinced themselves that the subjugation of other cultures was a moral necessity.²⁸

In addition, the moral necessity aspect of this idea is related to the Protestant religion and the way it was availed of by British colonists in their push into Africa, etc. Davey expands on his first assertion:

Now, having laid down the white man's burden, it is still thought natural for whites to expect preferment over blacks, and the disadvantaged position of the non-white immigrant is taken as natural.²⁹

If we consider Britain's long colonial relationship with Ireland as persistently undermining the Irish identity (religion, culture, language, etc.), subjugation and assimilation must be viewed as being part of that overall process. The legacy of this is seen not only in sectarianism but also in the uncertainty which the Irish in Scotland feel about their relationship to their heritage and origins.

Hickman argues that the wider process of "incorporation entailed pressure on the Irish to deny their Irishness or to be invisible and silent about their identity".³⁰ She sees the efforts by the indigenous Catholic Church in Britain to lessen and restrict the Irish identity of their recent Catholic flock as successful to the point at which the Irish joke (in which the Irish are portrayed as stupid and "thick") is acceptable among society and there is a widespread association of violence and the IRA with all things Irish.³¹ Sensationalist reporting of IRA violence creates and sustains an anti-Irish hysteria, which, in turn, undermines

²⁸ A. Davey, *Learning to be Prejudiced: Growing up in Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London, 1983), 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ M. Hickman, "A study of the incorporation of the Irish in Britain with special reference to Catholic state education: involving a comparison of the attitudes of pupils and teachers in selected Catholic schools in London and Liverpool" (unpublished London Ph.D. thesis, 1990), 257.

³¹ For example, in the wake of the IRA pub bombings in Birmingham, a *Daily Express* feature on 23 November 1974 stated: "Today in Birmingham, if you are called Sean or Patrick, you do not boast about it."

relations and perceptions in many communities.³² The process of debate is stunted and aborted and the result is a silencing of discussion and political and cultural activity by innuendo and association. People with certain “deviant” identities therefore become marginalised. Self perceptions of Irishness are thus devalued. All this reinforces a process of conformity and assimilation (rather than integration).

Protestant Churches, Orange and popular football expressions of attitudes in relation to Northern Ireland differ little from those of the popular media in Britain, particularly those reflected in the biggest selling national newspapers, the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror/Record*, the *Star* and the *Daily Express*. The Scottish broadsheet, *The Herald* also reflects this consensus via occasional editorial comment as well as through articles from its leading journalists.³³ Again this demonstrates an ideological convergence leading to perceptions which do not allow for the expressions of alternative attitudes. All this means that the Celtic environment is important for many Irish immigrant offspring because it is seen as a “safe” one for such expressions.

³² The British Press Council upheld a complaint in early 1991 against the *News of the World*, ruling that the paper’s assertion that “the IRA had murdered 2,758 men, women and children since the present troubles in Ireland began” was inaccurate and misleading. The paper was also criticised for not publishing a correction until 15 weeks later. The Council has in fact ruled against a number of newspapers for the same statement. See also the *Irish Post* 8 June 1991 and 16 March 1991 for reports on the PTA, and 23 March 1991 for report on the media-public atmosphere that allowed for the wrongful convictions of the “Birmingham Six” in the mid-1970s. See same newspaper “letters”, 13 Sept. 1991, Tom Shields Diary; *Herald*, 29 March 1991 and article by Michael Foley, “Skin Deep impression of emigration” in the *Irish Reporter*, issue 1, first quarter, 1991. See also the *Irish Post*, 8 Aug. 1992, for issue of Channel 4’s reporting of events in Northern Ireland, and reactions towards it: “Out of bounds for future reporting?” See also “Labour accuses police over ban on ‘pro-IRA’ meeting”, *Sunday Observer*, 30 Aug. 1992. In the light of acts of violence it must also be acknowledged that some of this anti-Irishness might be viewed as inevitable. Nonetheless, an historical and cultural perspective demonstrates that IRA atrocities are not required to give rise to anti-British sentiment, which it is argued here has its roots in the justification of British colonialism in Ireland.

³³ For example, see article by John MacLeod, 20 Sept. 1994, “A Marriage hatched in Hades”.

Hickman demonstrates how British government policy, allied with the intentions of the English Catholic hierarchy, strove to lessen the Irishness and de-politicise, as well as "civilise", the massive numbers of the offspring of the Irish in Britain.³⁴ In Scotland, this process was reflected in the cases of Bishop Murdoch and Bishop Scott and the "The Free Press" controversy.³⁵ A conservative, Catholic community, which referred little to its heritage, was one of the social and political goals of the hierarchy. There has always been little or no reference to Ireland in a British school curriculum (or indeed in third-level education) which stresses a common Anglo-Saxon and Scottish heritage. In the past "the teaching of subjects other than religion differed very little in Catholic elementary schools".³⁶ Thus, if the British and/or Scottish identity was being reinforced via the education system for the indigenous population, it invariably had a significant effect upon the Irish identity, whilst, in the longer term, possibly also undermining Catholicism itself (for there was little account taken of that religion in textbooks, etc.).

As far as Britain's relations with Ireland, and later Northern Ireland, are concerned, the Irish in Scotland have on the whole, despite supporting a united Ireland, been de-politicised in terms of political activity. This can be seen in media reporting of Irish political activity in Scotland which emphasises "sectarianism". So for example, when the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike raised consciousness among many in the Catholic community, one journalist's interpretation of an academic's view of this change was that he saw this as involving the raising of sectarian tensions.³⁷ Such a characterisation treats legitimate Irish political and ethnic expression as deviant and as one of the causes of sectarianism. It also ignores the roots of religious conflict in Scotland, the indigenous reaction to Irish immigration as well as the ideological framework involved in these.

³⁴ Hickman, "Irish in Britain", *passim*.

³⁵ See T. Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987), *passim*; J.E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1943), *passim*.

³⁶ Hickman, "Irish in Britain", 176.

³⁷ In profile of Steve Bruce in the *Glasgow Herald*, 21 Sept. 1989.

The colonial aspect of the relationship between Protestant-British and Catholic-Irish identities is crucial to any analysis which seeks to make clear the complexities of these identities. Colonialism cannot exist unless the conqueror sees himself as superior and the conquered as inferior. In this relationship the native will invariably be conscious of his/her low self-esteem and inferiority, if the wisdom of the colonist is held up to be truthful and persuasive. Justification of discrimination will be sought; denigration of the native culture, religion, language and identity is an inevitable outcome.

Curtis argues that this has long been a vital aspect of Britain's relationship with Ireland: "Anti-Irish prejudice, from which anti-Irish humour springs, is a very old theme in English culture".³⁸ Curtis stresses that this denigration is tied up with British colonialism and its corollary of British superiority and native inferiority. She cites examples of this "anti-Irish racism" as far back as the twelfth century and rising to peaks at the times of Irish rebellion and British oppression. Almost inevitably, this attitude has a relevance for today's conflict in Northern Ireland. In fact, Curtis argues: "Just as in previous centuries, the Irish are regularly depicted in the press and on television as stupid, drunken and backward."³⁹ The writer concludes with reference to the contemporary Irish joke in British society:

In a situation where the Irish are constantly denigrated, and where the war in the North is blamed on Irish "irrationality" rather than British policy, it is scarcely surprising that the centuries-old, anti-Irish joke has flourished once again.... Anti-Irish racism desensitises British people to atrocities committed in their name.⁴⁰

Such a consciousness pervades many references to Ireland by both Scots and British commentators. One example is particularly apposite for the concerns of this study. A cartoon published in a Scottish football newspaper early this century depicted two Old Firm players in

³⁸ L. Curtis, *Ireland: the Propaganda War* (London, 1984), introduction.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79-96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 86-96.

a bar playing pool. The cartoon portrayed the Celtic player as “typically” Irish, dumb with grotesque and brutish facial features. The Rangers player was handsome and with intelligent looking eyes. The cartoon was captioned “Apes and Aryans”.⁴¹ In present day Scottish society, and in a similar way to the history of the relationship between colonial black nations and their white superiors, such portrayals are generally viewed as being unlikely and unacceptable (that is, not politically correct). Nonetheless, such references are crucial to understanding the background of present-day relations. One observer believes that such prejudice and stereotypical attitudes:

... has to do mainly with racism and conquest – a politically motivated form of denigration brought into being by the British imperialists to deride the national identity and aspirations of the Irish people. History has shown that it has always been the way of empires not only to divide and to exploit but also to attack and pour scorn upon the self-respect of those they sought to subdue by ridiculing their race, colour, religious beliefs and mannerisms. And the harder they found it to conquer a people the more sustained and vicious the denigration imposed.⁴²

Davey highlights similar prejudice in the treatment of black/brown immigrants in English society.⁴³ He argues that:

their cultures are negatively evaluated and they are under constant pressure to adopt British habits, customs and values which they are assured will make a better way of life for them.

Ex-British Cabinet minister, Norman Tebbit demonstrated such reasoning as recently as 1989, when he suggested a novel type of cricket test. Asian immigrants’ integration could be tested by asking

⁴¹ *The Scottish Referee*, 3 Feb. 1905. Similar recent comment denigrating the Irish has originated from some writers in Glasgow and west of Scotland newspapers. See the *Irish Post*, 27 Feb. 1993, for two such reports.

⁴² Sean O Ciarian, *Irish Post*, 3 May 1990.

⁴³ Davie, *Learning to be Prejudiced*, introduction.

which cricket team they supported: England or Pakistan/India. He went on to suggest:

that those who continue to cheer for India and Pakistan, are wanting in Britishness ... that the only satisfactory way to be an Asian in Britain was to cease being Asian.⁴⁴

The cricket test, in its form as a “football test”, has also been applied regularly by the Scottish/British press in the 1980s and 1990s, as it became common for second and third generation Irish to represent and support the Republic of Ireland in international football. Deprecating comment has constantly characterised the success of the Irish football team. The logic which underpins such an argument was exposed by a respected British journalist:

the assertion, that we are one people, has always been a lie used to justify the the unjust dominance of one group (whites, Protestants or Anglo-Saxons, for example) over the whole society.⁴⁵

These examples, which in themselves might be normally unrelated comment, could be repeated many times and reflect a well developed broad ideological and attitudinal position. They link also with some of the earlier football references. Thus, the relationship between colonist and colonised is inadvertently referred to in its Scottish setting as “sectarianism”. In reality this relationship reflects a cleavage arising primarily from the coloniser in a fundamentally different setting, Scotland. The relationships between Britain and Ireland and Protestants and Catholics have always involved the domination of one group over another. Conflict has been present from the very first manifestations of this assertion of power, which aimed at eventually subordinating the Irish/Catholics and taking away their means of expression. Conflict is a result of domination. The British/Protestants sought to establish, through the course of the conflict, the foundations of their domination and tried to impose the legitimacy and universality of their norms and

⁴⁴ Quoted by Michael Ignatieff, *Sunday Observer*, 16 Sept. 1990.

⁴⁵ Adam Lively, *Sunday Observer*, 22 July 1990.

cultures on the subordinated group. In the Scottish context, the relationship of domination/subordination was reinforced because the subordinate Catholic group were a minority immigrant group considered as deviants by the majority Protestant community.

Historically in Scotland, the Irish and Catholic identities have been primarily undermined by their unacceptability to society. Irish and Catholic are clearly not the interchangeable terms they once were, though for those of an explicit anti-Catholic disposition, they remain so. Although in some societies identity can be strengthened in the face of antagonism, the conclusions of Hickman and of Curtis suggest that in Britain, large numbers of Irish people have underplayed their Irish, and in some circumstances Catholic, identity. Likewise, while the writer was carrying out the empirical part of this study some Catholic interviewees expressed their inhibitions in calling their children by Irish/Catholic forenames. In some instances, the Irish part of their identity was too difficult for them to recognise; they were inclined more towards a Scottish name or a name that had little to do with a conscious identity. In other cases however, the reason that “my child would never get a job” or “I don’t want to be bigoted”, were forwarded as the rationale for such decisions. For many Catholics in Scotland, the Irish identity is a submerged one. Apart from other factors, such as secularisation and inter-marriage, this is determined by way of anti-Catholicism and the present day, colonial, British-Scottish psychology which denigrates Irishness and, at times, Catholicism.⁴⁶

Despite the strength of the Irish identity in Scotland, this identity becomes less clear if we explore the cultural nuances involved. Catholics are not Scottish in the same ways as the host community, but they are also unsure of what their Irishness involves. This uncertainty is one of the reasons why it is only in the context of Celtic and football that many people feel confident enough to display this aspect of their identity and reject the cultural and national orthodoxy. Ironically, this

⁴⁶ The research for this paper as well as ongoing research into the Catholic community in Scotland reflects that the vast majority of churchgoing Catholics have Catholic parents. This clearly shows that among Catholics who are falling away from the Church those who marry outside of the faith are very likely either to continue not attending church, or to stop going.

has created a mould which is rejected and resented by the indigenous population. So, a great deal of the disdain and antagonism towards the immigrant community has been channelled into the football environment.

Negative attitudes towards the Irish identity may in fact also have damaged the Catholic practice of the Irish community. At the very least, it seems to have reduced the cultural barriers against Catholic secularisation (a phenomenon which has generally served to shape and redefine identity in Scotland). This analysis has some substance because the Irish cultural group and Celtic fans surveyed, who are the two groups with the “highest” levels of Irish consciousness, are both seen to contain large proportions of individuals with high levels of Catholic church attendance. Recent work carried out by Professor James O’Connell of Bradford University confirms this hypothesis.⁴⁷ Hickman stresses that “ideologies of superiority and inferiority always accompany colonisation”.⁴⁸ In essence, this is a “post-colonial cleavage”. Despite its variations, the Protestant-Catholic relationship in Scotland today can be viewed as an extension of, and subsequently different setting for, the British/Scots – Irish colonial relationship.

In perspective

In the recent past there has been a tendency among some commentators on religious identities and cleavage in Scotland, to misunderstand its origins, its significance and its implications. For many Catholics in Scotland, there exists a broad constituency of Protestants – whether church-going or otherwise – who are overtly or covertly, actively or passively, disturbed by Roman Catholicism, particularly in its Scottish-Irish context. The roots of ethno-religious cleavage in Scotland lie in this constituency. It is a cleavage which varies in application, intensity, subtleness or openness, depending on circumstances and geographical location. This study recognises also the limits of ethno-religious cleavage in Scottish society. Anti-Catholicism is not totally pervasive, though if we took each social cleavage in isolation it is clearly a very

⁴⁷ See results of survey in the *Irish Post*, 28 Jan. 1995.

⁴⁸ Hickman, “Irish in Britain”, 18.

important one; and certainly for a number of people, the dominant one. Scotland is not a polarised society, but anti-Catholicism is a key cultural and social feature particularly in central Scotland, although its make-up and prominence vary in other parts.

Football in Scotland is a way of displaying separateness and distinctiveness that is identity. It has become the major environment for celebrating and confirming ethnic differences. It is for this reason that it is a mistake to ignore the importance of football as an important indicator of social and political attitudes. In Scotland, identity has been transposed, in part, into the rivalry between football teams, and the hostilities which can result from the conflict of identities are experienced in their sharpest forms in the football arena. Ideas concerning proximity, salience and circumstances are also important to football. For a number of people, football raises the intensity of these identities because in this environment they are not subsumed. Football is a competitive situation by nature and in Scotland extra-religious features are drawn into, and limited by, that competition.

The psychological satisfaction that people gain from football victories, related media coverage, social events, wearing the respective team colours and identifying with the emblems and symbols, which represent hundreds of years of history as well as everyday realities, is immense. The creation and development of such cultures has been a feature then of Scottish football. In particular, Celtic Football Club help sustain a counter culture, which is Irish nationalist and Catholic in nature, and which is opposed to the perceived dominance of Scottish/British Protestant culture. For Rangers and Celtic fans in particular, games are often viewed as opportunities for para-political expression. Rivalry between the fans of both clubs corresponds in a sense to the much larger religious and colonial rivalries that are centuries old.

In addition, the powerlessness experienced by many people in the political arena, often crucially shaped by the media, may be reflected by holding and expressing social and political attitudes, which not only fail to translate into party political expression, but also become focused on arenas which are outside of "higher" political processes. Politics for many people can become privatised and translated into spheres of

culture and identity. That was the case, for example, when the Sunday football team of an Irish pub in Coatbridge (Scotland) turned out in the strips of the Argentinean national side in the midst of the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982. This was a clear case of a section of the community raising their Irishness, as well as their anti-British attitudes, to the level of a political statement. Political parties and their concerns are often irrelevant to the real concerns of many people. Yet the social and political attitudes of people are important elements of identity and may have a broader political resonance. Certainly, in the case of Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs, political sentiments and attitudes are not only expressed, but are often viewed as central features in the clubs' identities; features which are rarely clearly expressed through the formal political process.

It is also true that even a cursory glance at contemporary Scottish society suggests that religious cleavage is no longer so overtly reflected in certain areas of political and social life. However, an argument here is that although there has been a movement away from overt areas of conflict and cleavage, such conflict has been displaced, to a significant extent. Modernisation, capitalism, welfarism and secularisation have diminished and obscured the cleavage, facilitated its reshaping, whilst simultaneously affecting the national, cultural and religious identities which have long been intertwined with historical factors. One of the main results of this reconstitution and reshaping, has been the compartmentalising of many of the aspects of these identities. So much so, that for Catholics, the Irish identity is less clear because of pressure to conform to the dominant identities and cultures; not only to integrate, but to assimilate. It should also be noted that assimilation, not integration, has been an inherent policy in/or consequence of, colonialism itself.

In addition, and in a social, religious, and political sense, secularism in the latter part of the twentieth century has undoubtedly become the biggest factor in the monumental metamorphoses in Protestantism; this, in a formal religious sense, previously the essence of the identity of the Scottish people. An important factor for the indigenous population is the contemporary debate over the Scots identity or identities in/of Scotland, which suggests among other things

that the historically strong and integrative force of Protestantism as *the* identity of the contemporary Scot is in question.⁴⁹ If new definitions are to evolve, then clearly there must be accommodation for those of a fundamentally different origin and culture.⁵⁰ Even if the Scottish identity is to remain an inherently Protestant one in character (albeit without the anti-Catholic dimension), then a similar accommodation remains. This should evolve if Scotland is to be recognised as a modern multi-cultural and plural society. It cannot entail the dominance or imposition of a oneness that fails to recognise difference. With the question of the Northern Ireland conflict possibly being opened up for a more informative debate as a step towards a long-term solution, then this may also cease to contribute to the persistence of some of the worst aspects of ethno-religious cleavage within Scottish society.

⁴⁹ Most of the Scottish quality press has covered this in latter years. See Arnold Kemp, *Herald*, 1 Aug. 1992, for example.

⁵⁰ Little mention has been made in politics or any other area of society with regard to accommodating the different identities of the people who now make up Scottish society (the first notable comment in relation to Catholics, originating with the SNP leader Alex Salmond in late 1994). With regard to the Irish identity in Scotland, it remains largely unrecognised, ignored and treated as a manifestation of sectarianism within Scottish society. Pat Kane of pop group Hue and Cry, a "popular" spokesman for the Scottish nationalist cause in Scotland, has in recent years expressed his desire for either the diminishing in stature of, or a fundamental change in, the identity of the Celtic Football Club, that is, the eradication of their Irish identity. Somewhat paradoxically, Kane a former Catholic of Irish descent, sees Glasgow Rangers in their role as a European football power in the early 1990s as fitting his own ideas of what a Scottish football club should be like. See *Scotsman*, Weekender, "Why must Bhoys always be Bhoys?", 14 April 1990. See also letters in the *Irish Post*, 16 May 1992, 23 May 1992 and 22 June 1992, for some Scottish nationalists' denial of the existence of an Irish identity in Scotland.

